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RURAL YOUTH IN A CHANGING WORLD.

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RURAL YOUTH ARE CONFRONTED WITH THE SERIOUS PARADOX OF OPPORTUNITY AND FRUSTRATION. OPPORTUNITIES ARE PLENTIFUL FOR THOSE WHO POSSESS SKILLS AND ABILITIES NECESSARY FOR COMPETING IN OUR TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED SOCIETY, BUT LIMITED FOR THOSE WHO ARE UNABLE TO COMPETE IN OUR SOCIETY EITHER IN JOB COMPETITION OR IN SOCIAL PROCESSES. THE DISADVANTAGEMENT FACED BY THESE RURAL YOUTH CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO SEVERAL FACTORS SUCH AS--(1) A HIGHER DROPOUT RATE, (2) A GREATER POVERTY INCIDENCE, (3) FEWER CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND (4) POORER HEALTH FACILITIES. TO COMBAT THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING RURAL YOUTH, IT IS NECESSARY TO ACCEPT THREE CHALLENGES--(1) TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF AVAILABLE RURAL OPPORTUNITIES, (2) TO REALIZE THE LIMITATIONS OF RURAL LIFE AND TO RECOGNIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT EXIST ELSEWHERE, AND (3) TO BE AWARE OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES NOT ONLY TO RURAL AMERICA, BUT ALSO OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO AN AMERICA WHERE THERE IS NO DIVISION BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D.C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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RURAL YOUTH IN A CHANGING WORLD

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I must admit feeling quite humbled to appear on this program with such a distinguished group of persons and also to address this audience representing institutions for which I have the greatest amount of respect.

As Secretary Wirtz has told you, I am a product of rural America, of the 4-H Clubs, of the Future Farmers of America, farm organizations of various types, of a land-grant college, a small community, a small high school, a rural church and a farm family. I am proud of that heritage in agriculture and in rural America; but, nevertheless, I am not blind to the many pressing problems in rural America which face persons of my age, as I see them as a student, not forgetting that probably my generation has many more opportunities than previous generations due to great cultural and economic advances.

It is important for us to look for problems because only in that way can we improve. I hope that in concentrating on problems rather than benefits I don't appear to be like a classmate of mine in the second grade. I'd like to share that incident with you. When I was in the second grade our class used to trade class pictures as I am sure many of you have done. We would take a whole day as a type of a national holiday, I guess, and trade pictures. I'm sure we must have taken as much time as we could in order to avoid studying our lessons. As I remember the first day that we exchanged pictures, we were all enjoying the new activity except little Bobby. About half way through the day Bobby asked the teacher, "why do we exchange these pictures?" The teacher was surprised at the question, but she had a ready answer. "Well, Bobby," she said, "that is very easy to answer. We exchange pictures so that twenty years from now you can look at those pictures and you can say, 'Well, there is George. He is back on the farm, and Larry is an architect down in the city, and there's a picture of Susie. She is a nurse now.'" Little Sally was snickering in the second row, and the teacher asked, "What's the matter, Sally?" And Sally said, "And there's teacher, and she's dead."

There are many young persons and adults alike who see only the problems confronting rural America and the institutions that have built rural America. Seeing only problems, they look forward to the time when they can say that these institutions are dead. I can't agree with such a hasty analysis. Obviously. some institutions have outlived their value;

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others need to be changed or to be given new direction. But to say that because there are problems we should throw everything away and start from scratch, is to forsake much valuable knowledge and wisdom that has been developed over time. Most of you in this audience realize the values of many existing rural institutions and would not advocate such a radical, poorly analyzed attempt at problem solving. I think most of the young people of America agree with you. But young persons from rural America should also realize the greater hazard of covering problems rather than seeking them out. We, as rural youth, are faced with many frustrations. We are trying to understand our problems so that we can eliminate them. In some cases such elimination of rural problems may require radical changes; in others a mere change of emphasis may be sufficient.

In talking about the problems of rural youth, I may seem to resemble a patient trying to give advice to his doctor, because as I mentioned, I am a product of the very institutions which you represent. But who knows better where it hurts or how it hurts. The young people of America can be of great benefit to you. I know that many of you use youth frequently for counsel and advice, and I appreciate your willingness to listen to a young person today. So, perhaps what I can do best this morning is to talk with you about my thoughts as a young person and the problems that confront me and other young people throughout the country.

Many young rural Americans are extremely frustrated. They are told of opportunities that they can't find, and they are faced with problems that are obvious and discouraging. When we know what these problems are--perhaps when we know "where it hurts"--then I think that we can make progress.

There are just some things that can't be done. We can't solve tomorrow's problems with yesterday's remedies. When we see areas where we have not been successful, we must be honest in admitting that these are problem areas. I am happy to see such a conference as this because I think it is a very excellent attempt to solve rural problems and not merely to praise each other on what has been done, although much is deserved.

A friend of mine shared with me a bit of philosophy a couple of years ago which I think is good to remember. He said, "Silence isn't always golden. Sometimes it is just downright yellow." I agree with Secretary Wirtz's opening comment that responsible dissent is indeed very meaningful. It shows that people are developing attitudes, and that they are thinking. I am convinced that the young people in America today are willing to take a stand; they are willing to avoid the silence that sometimes is just downright yellow. We in rural America, whether we are young people or adults, must be strong enough to know where we are weak and brave enough to face ourselves when we see that some things we have tried have failed.

The youth of rural America are faced with a serious paradox. It is a paradox of opportunity and frustration. They were nurtured in the

traditions of a rural environment, and they have known the values of individuality and unrestrained enterprise that many have said characterize rural America. Yet they are entering a future where in many ways rural and urban are becoming one and the same. They have been reared in a land that has the most advanced agriculture that this world has ever known. They have been aware of and have lived through a period of rapid technological advance, but they are unprepared to face a future in which communities, institutions and rural order will be changing just as rapidly as today's fertilization techniques and farm machinery. It is this social change in rural America, that many youth have not been prepared for, which causes much of the frustration.

Unlike our parents, only about one-tenth of rural young people will be able to return successfully to farm life. The other ninety percent in many cases are not prepared to find employment and are not prepared for the social environment of an urban community. These young people have heard the typical platitudes of commencement speakers, that "Our generation has failed, but still there is more opportunity for you than for any generation before." Although I don't agree that the past generations have failed, it is true that the widely proclaimed opportunity is quite elusive. When students seek their individual parts of that wealth of opportunity, many find that they have not been guided in the right manner for the development of their individual abilities. After they find what vocation they would like to pursue, often they haven't been prepared adequately with the education and skills necessary to meet their goals. When they try to enter the labor force, many of them find that they haven't been prepared as well as their urban contemporaries. Many other young rural Americans don't even know where to go or how to seek employment.

We probably do have a greater opportunity than generations before us. But for many rural youth that opportunity falls far short of the opportunities presented to other segments of today's American society. We heard many figures last evening indicating that most rural young people will be living in an urban environment, but they are generally not nearly as well prepared as urban young people. Thus the frustration is increased.

I have heard that there are three kinds of people in the world: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who have no idea what is happening. Speaking in a broad generality, I think that people in rural America want to make things happen, and of course they want to watch things happen too. But unfortunately, in many cases, they haven't been prepared to know what is happening in the first place.

In spite of many advantages, when we compare rural America with urban America we find that our rural population has more than its share of problems. We find that rural income, as we all know, is very low. The incidence of poverty in rural America is much greater than in most urban areas. Incentive to remain in high school or in college is evidently not as great

in rural America because the dropout rate is higher. In all too many situations the educational and vocational opportunities that are afforded rural young people are quite limited. Rural institutions that were designed to provide improved health, improved culture and improved education have become ineffective in many areas. Some of these institutions are still trying to meet problems that existed several years ago and are not successfully meeting problems that are facing young people today. Rural slums are still present in too many localities. Individual fulfillment is also stifled.

I don't intend to paint a totally dark picture, because I don't believe the picture is all dark. But we need direction and we need guidance. Young people need to know where they are going, where the opportunities may be found. They need to be educated and prepared for those opportunities. The institutions of rural America must base their direction upon renewed, vigorous study and sound advice.

In a speech given just about a year ago, Secretary Freeman described a dream that I think all of us share regardless of political belief. It is a dream that portrays the future of rural America. This is what he said:

> "I would like to share this dream and goal with you, and to do this I ask that you dream with me for a few minutes. Imagine, if you will, a time in the future when hundreds and hundreds of existing rural communities and hundreds of new rural communities offer everything the big cities offer except congestion and confusion, crime and chaos, polluted air and dirty water, overcrowded schools and jobless ghettos, racial unrest and riots in the streets. Imagine new and revitalized communities, each with its own local source of employment, each with its own factories, each with its own college or university, each with its own medical center, each with its own cultural, entertainment, and recreational advantages. Imagine a rural America without poverty, without rural slums and shacks, a rural America where every family farmer enjoys parity of income and parity of living."

Certainly this is the direction that we should all be going.

Our dream is not just for agricultural abundance and prosperity. We have reached such a level of superiority in agricultural technology that in all likelihood we will continue to do well. We have increased output per acre, per animal and per worker in America at fantastic rates. In fact, output per worker in American agriculture has doubled in the last 20 years. There are few areas in our economy that can claim such progress in technological efficiency. It has been said that agriculture is the strength of our Nation because of this tremendous advance. Such excellence has not come by accident. Many of you have probably read Secretary Gardner's book, entitled <u>Excellence</u>. Excellence in agriculture was made possible by many

factors, including hard work, educational opportunities, and the application of science and the scientific method. Continued emphasis on agricultural abundance is important, but not as essential as increased emphasis on the development of our human resources.

There are three challenges that I think all of us must face. The first is to take full advantage of rural opportunities. There are many. A farm background can develop qualities which are valuable for many different occupations. For those young people who find it desirable to return to the farm there certainly is going to be a challenging and potentially rewarding life in the future. That ten percent of our rural youth should be prepared to take full advantage of their farm backgrounds. On the other hand, the same background can be valuable in other areas of agriculture and can be applied to other unrelated areas of endeavor. The experience of planning, setting goals, realizing the reward of hard work, and assuming responsibility can be valuable for any vocation.

The second challenge that confronts us is the challenge to realize the limitations of rural life and to recognize the opportunities that exist elsewhere. Too often young persons are educated only in rural opportunities, not in the urban opportunities which may be of greater practical value.

The third challenge is that we must be aware of our responsibilities not only to rural America, but also our responsibility to an America where there is no division between rural and urban communities. We need to develop an ability to see ourselves in perspective as we contribute to the larger goals of our Nation and of the entire world. One of my favorite glee club songs is "Mankind Should Be My Business." It says, "Mankind should be my business. Mankind should be my trade. I realize it is my business to give my fellow man my aid. The whole world should be my office. Heaven should be my boss. Man's happiness should be my profit. His suffering should be my loss." We should strive to instill that attitude of oneness of purpose for all mankind in young rural Americans.

There are many improvements needed in rural America that are necessary if young people are to attain their highest potential. The first of these is an enthusiasm on the part of the institutions that serve rural America. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm."

Vice President Humphrey suggested last night that it is time for us to stop letting the American youth chase education and instead we should have education chase them. Perhaps we should also chase youth with employment opportunities. We should prepare youth for various vocations and we should make them aware of vocational and job opportunities. Fortunately instruction in vocational agriculture has been broadened as a result of the Vocational Education Act of 1963. But there is a great demand for many vocational training programs outside of agriculture.

There is also a need for a broader general educational and cultural background. This must come not only from increasing the non-agricultural vocational instruction but also by upgrading the total school programs, realizing that the schools are usually the center of the social and cultural community. We must improve the guidance and the curriculum of rural schools. That, of course, presents many problems in communities which hesitate to make changes in their educational systems. The extension service is another area where educational upgrading can and is being done.

Private enterprise can also assist in making essential improvements in rural America and can help provide occupational opportunities for youth. We must involve private industry in rural communities so it may share in solving the problems of rural young people. We are finding that improved efficiency in agriculture and progress in transportation and technology have made it possible for many farm youth to spend their adult lives in cities. The same improvement of communications and transportation has also motivated many industries to move into rural areas, offering new employment opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a great faith in rural America--a great faith in America of which rural America is a part. You and the organizations that you represent are going to have the greatest challenge of all. You are bringing this faith into reality by recognizing problems and by sharing in the creation of a brighter future for rural youth.